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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 000267

SIPDIS

STATE PASS EUR/WE FOR KATHERINE SHARP AND MARK POWELL,
AF/FO STAFF ASSISTANTS, AND AF/C CHRISTOPHER LAMORA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR ACTING A/S CARTER WITH BELGIAN MFA
AFRICA TEAM

¶1. Acting A/S Carter, your trip to Brussels comes at a time when the Belgian government is eager for dialogue with the United States on Africa. Your willingness to meet MFA Africa policy hands will help show that the U.S. takes Belgian views seriously and is willing to consider coordinating with Belgium in areas where our interests and approaches coincide.

Belgium's main concern in Africa is the Democratic Republic of Congo--Belgium's number one foreign policy priority. The Belgians believe their history and continued engagement with the DRC provides them with unique insight into the region. The GOB wants a stable, secure and peaceful Congo, and will work with the international community, the GoDRC, neighboring African countries, and in multilateral fora to achieve this aim. The Government of Belgium (GOB) is also concerned with events in neighboring countries that impact the DRC. Sudan is a specific case of a country where FM De Gucht and MFA Africa Director Guy Trouveroy have experience and interest, and could be another opportunity for closer cooperation with the GOB.

¶2. The MFA Africa team we plan to introduce you to consists of: Africa Director Ambassador Guy Trouveroy, Great Lakes Envoy Karl Dehaene, the Foreign Minister's Deputy Chef du Cabinet Jean-Luc Bodson, and Senior Congo Desk Officer Koen Adam.

Belgium's Goals in the Congo

¶3. Belgium's new Ambassador in the Congo, former Ambassador to the U.S., Dominique Struye, took up his post in mid February, after an almost eight month freeze in Belgium's diplomatic relations with the DRC, due to FM De Gucht's strong criticism of DRC President Kabila in April, 2008. Belgium's next priorities are reopening its consulates in Bukavu and Lubumbashi, and restarting foreign assistance coordination. The GOB is a driving force in the EU for promoting European engagement with Africa. Dehaene and Adam will have just returned from Paris and will be prepared to share their perspectives on the Sarkozy Plan for the Congo.

¶4. Belgium believes the Great Lakes Contact Group agenda is moving forward smoothly. Belgium's stated objective for the Congo is peace and stability, and the GOB views restoration of the state's capacity to promote law and order throughout the country as the best means to do so. However, the GOB realizes corruption, lack of effective command and control of the military, and the illicit export of mineral resources are major obstacles to ending armed internal conflict.

¶5. The Belgians are involved in several activities they see as important in the DRC. They believe the security sector reform (SSR) program remains crucial in promoting security,

strengthening the army, and in police and justice programs. Training rapid reaction forces is also a Belgian priority. Belgium is looking at closer coordination with the U.S. in these areas. Accordingly, Belgium wants to look at ways forward on army reform, will make a push for improvements in openness and transparency in customs processes, and remains interested in the mineral resources sector and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

Belgian Concerns

¶6. Belgium is skeptical of what it perceives as some partners' proposed "quick fixes" for the Congo, such as certain French initiatives and what it sees as a U.S. tilt toward military approaches. Inside the Belgian government and in public opinion, the recent Rwandan-DRC and Ugandan operations in the east of Congo were viewed very negatively, and Belgians are deeply troubled by media reports of supposed U.S. support of these operations. Belgium believes military operations will result in unacceptable civilian casualties and atrocities such as those reported in the aftermath of last month's operation by Ugandan forces against the Lord's Resistance Army. The Embassy has invited AFRICOM Deputy Commander Mary Carlin Yates to Brussels next month to help dispel Belgian misperceptions about AFRICOM and to encourage cooperation between AFRICOM and the Belgian military.

¶7. Belgium will remain interested primarily in the DRC, its periphery, and in assisting other countries in Africa to improve its credibility on Congo issues. Foreign Minister De Gucht and Ambassador Trouveroy are personally interested in

BRUSSELS 00000267 002 OF 002

Sudan, and have allocated MFA funds to train Sudanese diplomats from the north and south. The GOB is skeptical about self-determination for southern Sudan, and does not believe it could be a viable entity. Belgium has provided troops to the EU mission in Chad intended to protect refugees from Darfur. Belgium is also contributing a frigate to patrol the Somali coast starting in late 2009, and is committed to the Task Force on Piracy. Belgium will attend each of the four working groups.

¶8. In your discussions with the Belgians, we suggest you:

- Share available insights on the new administration's priorities in Africa, and especially with regard to the DRC and its environs;

- Appreciate Belgium's commitment to deploy a frigate to deter piracy in the Indian Ocean;

- Emphasize our genuine interest in dialogue and cooperation with Belgium on Africa;

- Encourage Belgium to consider additional concrete cooperation with AFRICOM.

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